



Testimony, HB4749
House Regulatory Reform Committee
May 29, 2007

My name is Arlene Gorelick, and I am President of the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan. The Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan, founded in 1948, is the only statewide non-profit organization that focuses entirely on seizure disorders. Our mission is to “empower people with epilepsy to live productive lives”. The Foundation is a separately incorporated affiliate of the national Epilepsy Foundation.

The Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan opposes House Bill 4749, which would remove the protections of mandatory motorcycle helmets under certain conditions.

About 25 percent of all cases of epilepsy are attributed to some kind of injury to the head. Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of head injuries--about 50-60 percent in most studies. Epilepsy occurs in 2–5 percent of those who have had a head injury. Nationally, about 5,000 new cases of epilepsy are attributed to head injury each year.

The Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan is concerned about preventing accidents because of their relationship to the risk of developing epilepsy, which can be the result of some kind of trauma to the head. For that reason, the Epilepsy Foundation has long been a proponent of safety devices, including automobile safety belts, motorcycle helmets and bicycle helmets, and safe use of boats, motorcycles, and other recreational vehicles.

The evidence in support of helmet use is overwhelming. Head injury is the leading cause of death in motorcycle crashes. A motorcyclist is 16 times more likely to die in a crash than an automobile driver. Head injuries are the leading cause of death in motorcycle accidents, and riders without helmets are 40 percent more likely to sustain a fatal head injury. Statistics show that in states where helmets are not required, only 50 percent of motorcyclists wear them. Unhelmeted motorcyclists are over three times as likely to suffer a brain injury when compared to those motorcyclists that wear helmets.

The current bill, with the requirement of purchasing of an H permit - \$100 a year or \$200 for three years, that the rider be 21 years old, have two years of riding experience and \$20,000 in health insurance does nothing to alleviate our concerns about removing mandatory helmet use.

Studies show that when helmets are voluntary, younger, inexperienced drivers will not wear them, thereby placing them at risk. It would be very difficult for law enforcement to make these distinctions in riders.

We also find \$20,000 in health insurance a far cry from the average cost a head injury creates in terms of medical care and social costs. Estimates presented that removing the mandatory restriction would generate \$25 million to the general fund and \$1.2 billion in new tourism



revenue appear to be based on faulty assumptions. Costs to the public in terms of tax dollars are more likely to outweigh any potential benefit.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee on these important issues.